

THE SYSTEM OF ŚAṆKARA:
REALITY, ILLUSION, PERSPECTIVISM

Śaṅkara (circa 700 A.D.) is the author of a great number of works: commentaries on several *Upaniṣads*, brief treatises, hymns, and a commentary on the *Vedānta-sūtras* or *Brahmasūtras*, that is a systematization of the teachings of the *Upaniṣads* composed by Bādarāyaṇa in the beginning of our Era. This last commentary is considered his most important work. It is a powerful and brilliant treatise.

Śaṅkara is the founder of Non-dualist Vedānta (Advaita-Vedānta) School, one of the most important schools dedicated to the interpretation of the *Upaniṣads* and the one that has more presence in the philosophical and religious thought in India.

The system of Śaṅkara exerted a great influence on Indian thought and it is the philosophical system that more adherents has in India. See V. S. Naravane, *Modern Indian Thought. A Philosophical Survey*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964, Ripusudan Prasad Srivastava, *Contemporary Indian Idealism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973, Rama Shanker Srivastava, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Munshi Ram Monohar Lal, 1965, and S. Radakrishnan and J. H. Muirhead (edd.), *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, London: George

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Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958. Among the systems of Indian thought, leaving aside Yoga and Buddhism, Śāṅkara's system is the best known in the West; it was spread by the disciples of Rāmākrishna and presented as the principal exponent of Indian "spirituality".

Name and philosophical position of the system of Śāṅkara

To the doctrine of Śāṅkara is applied the name of "Advaita" ("Non-duality"), as it sustains, on one hand, the existence of a sole and unique real entity: *Brahman / Ātman*, and, on the other hand, that all that is not *Brahman / Ātman* is only illusion (*māyā*), a product of ignorance (*avidyā*) that masters human mind. On the term "advaita" see the article by L. Schmithausen in J. Ritter (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971 ff., Vol. 1, pp. 86-87.

Taking into account the first aspect, Śāṅkara's system may be qualified as "monistic" in the same sense which Chr. Wolff, *Psychologia rationalis* (1734), pp. 24 and ff., attributes to this term in the context of Western philosophy: "*Monistae dicuntur philosophi qui unum tantummodo substantiae genus admittunt*" [the philosophers who admit only one kind of substance are called monists] (quoted in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 6, p. 132, sub "Monismus"). Taking into account the second aspect, Śāṅkara's system may be considered "idealistic", in the same way the terms "idealism" and "idealistic" are understood in their Western context by Chr. Wolff and his disciples (cited work, Paragraph 36) when they affirm that idealists negate the real existence of the world and of the bodies, and that to these only corresponds an ideal existence in our soul; by Chr. Bilfinger, *Dilucidationes philosophicae* (1725), Paragraph 115: "*Existere spiritum infinitum et finitos quoque ab illo dependentes, sed nihil existere praeter ea*" [there exist an infinite spirit and finite spirits depending on it, but with their exception nothing else exists], and by Kant, *Prolegomena*, Paragraph 13, Note II: "*Idealism consists in the affirmation that there are only thinking beings, the other things, that we think we are grasping in perception, would only be representations in the thinking being, to which in fact does not correspond any object*".

external to them", cited in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 4, pp. 30-33, article "Idealismus" by H. Zeltner.

General features of Śaṅkara's system

In Śaṅkara's system are opposed a true reality, one and unique, designated with the name of *Brahman*, and an illusion that manifests itself under three forms or aspects, the *jīva* (spiritual individual principle), the world and the *Īśvara* (Lord, personal God).

It is not to be argued that the uniqueness of *Brahman* becomes invalidated as it is opposed to the triple illusion of the *jīva*, the world, and the Lord, since for Indian thinking the uniqueness of a true reality postulated as unique can only be derogated by another true reality; the existence of an illusory reality that faces that true reality postulated as unique does not derogate the uniqueness of such a true reality. If before us there is only a rope and we take it for a serpent, the uniqueness of the rope as something real is not destroyed by the illusion of the serpent we have superimposed on the rope.

Śaṅkara's "illusionism" has not pleased many interpreters, ancient and modern, Indian or Westerners, of a profound theistic conviction. They have tried to weaken, dissimulate or even negate Śaṅkara's conception that the world and the Lord are mere illusions created by ignorance or error or nescience which dominates man, in their intent of bringing Śaṅkara (whom they admire and cannot but admire) nearer to their own cherished doctrinary positions, or those of the milieu where they carry out their activities. A case like that is that of Kokileswar Sastri, author of a book entitled *An Introduction to Advaita Philosophy [A Critical and Systematic Exposition of Sankara School of Vedanta]*, Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1979. Sastri dedicates many pages to refute Śaṅkara's ideas on the unreality of the Lord (pp. 36-50) or the falsity of the world (pp. 123-176).

This book, in spite of its deficiencies, deserved warm praises from many prestigious indologists of the epoch, taking into account the extracts of the letters added by the author to the second edition of his work. Among these praising appreciations we have for instance that of Louis de la Vallée Poussin (p. 2 from the *Extracts from*

Opinions), the great Belgian buddhologist who agrees with Sastri because he also considers that “it is not the intention of Śaṅkara either to negate the existence of a personal God, omniscient and almighty, or the existence of the human souls or of the world in which we live”.

The non-illusionist interpretation of the system of Śaṅkara seems to us an error. Śaṅkara does not negate the existence of the empirical ego and of the world, but he considers that it is, in both cases, an *illusory* existence. Śaṅkara accepts the existence of a personal God (the Lord), creator and governor of the world, and that it can be the object of a profound and true devotion, but he thinks that His existence is an *illusory* existence, as that of the empirical ego, and as that of the world. The imposing and excluding reality of *Brahman* hinders that besides It another reality arises or maintains itself. If ignorance or error or nescience proper to man constructs another reality besides *Brahman*, this reality disappears when man reaches Knowledge, the knowledge of *Brahman*. The creative process of another reality, different from *Brahman*, and the destructive process of that other false reality have place only in the epistemological level.

Śaṅkara started from the idea, that he found in the *Upaniṣads*, the sacred texts of India, that *Brahman* is the only real; and, as a good Indian thinker, with an implacable logical reasoning he brought this principle to its ultimate and extreme consequences.

Brahman

Brahman is, as we said, the only really existent. Apart from It there is nothing endowed with a nature that is not illusory. This characteristic must be taken constantly into account when the doctrine of Śaṅkara is expounded, and all that may be said on his doctrine must strictly agree with this characteristic.

Śaṅkara's commentary to Bādarāyaṇa's aphorism III, 2, 36, p. 727 (of the Nirṇaya Sāgar Press edition that we quote in this article accompanied by the English translation of George Thibaut, whose complete references are found at the end in the *Bibliography*) leaves no doubt and clearly establishes that for Śaṅkara with the exception of *Brahman* nothing exists. In this commentary Śaṅkara conclusively

expresses that, according to the aphorism he comments: “Similarly on the account of the denial (by the Scriptures) of all other entities [III, 2, 36], it is understood that there does not exist any other entity transcending *Brahma*” [V.M. Apte’s translation] [tathānyapratishedhād api na brahmaṇaḥ paraṁ vastvantaram astīti gamyate] (lines 10-11); and, after quoting several Upaniṣadic texts, he declares that they “...distinctly deny that there exists anything apart from *Brahman*” [brahmavyatiriktaṁ vastvantaram vārayanti] (line 16).

The uniqueness of *Brahman* eliminates all possibility of duality. Neither in *Brahman* nor in relation to It nor besides It, the existence of something that in a certain measure eliminates, limits, lessens or affects that uniqueness can be postulated or accepted.

A direct consequence of the uniqueness of *Brahman* is the impossibility of knowing It and of defining It. All knowledge implies duality, the subject-object duality. All definition is subordinated to the knowledge of that which one pretends to define. And, in the case of the knowledge of *Brahman*, in the very moment in which this Knowledge arises, simultaneously all duality disappears absorbed in the supreme singularity of *Brahman*.

In order to give an idea concerning what *Brahman* is, only the “*Via Negationis*” is possible, i.e. it is only possible to indicate what *Brahman* is not. In several passages of his commentary Śaṅkara points out *Brahman*’s attributes of *negative character* in the sense that they designate the lack of determinate characteristic (good or bad it does not matter). See III, 2, 17, pp. 709, line 22 (There are not in It any particular characteristics [nirviśeṣa]; III, 2, 17, p. 710, line 1 (It lacks a beginning) [anādimat]; III, 2, 17, p. 710, line 2 (It is neither existent nor inexistent) [brahma na sat tan nāsad ucyate]; IV, 3, 14, p. 998, line 18 (It lacks any particular characteristic coming from space, time, etc.) [na deśakālādiviśeṣayogaḥ]); II, 1, 27, p. 476, line 21 (It lacks parts) [niravayavatvam]; I, 1, 20, p. 192, line 9 (It does not possess any form) [na ca ... rūpavattvam]; III, 2, 26, p. 722, line 10 (It is limitless) [ananta]; II, 1, 14, p. 461, lines 6-8 (it cannot suffer any change or transformation) [vikriyā ... pariṇāma°].

In some passages of his commentary of Bādarāyaṇa’s work (III, 2, 18, p. 710, line 6; III, 2, 22, p. 718, line 7, p. 719, line 8, p. 720, line 2), Śaṅkara expresses that *Brahman* “is beyond word and mind”

[*vānmanasāṭita*], i.e. that neither the word can define It nor the mind conceive It, repeating the well-known teaching of the *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* II, 4, 1.

In the commentaries of the *Bṛihadāranyaka-Upaniṣad* II, 3, 6, *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* VII, 1, 3, *Bhagavad Gītā* XIII, 12, Śaṅkara refers to what can be considered as the maximum level of the *Via Negationis*, the celebrated formula of the *Bṛihadāranyaka-Upaniṣad* (II, 3, 6) that asserts that in order to define *Brahman* it is only possible to have recourse to the negation expressed by the adverb “no”, that the *Upaniṣad* repeats twice. We give in what follows the translation of the corresponding passage of Śaṅkara’s commentary to the *Bṛihadāranyaka-Upaniṣad*: “How is it wished to define the Reality of the Reality [satyasya satyam] by means of these two words: ‘no, no’ [na-iti, na-iti]? It is answered: ‘With the exclusion of any particular characteristic [viśeṣa] that constitutes a limitation [upādhi].’ [One has to proceed in this way] in relation to somebody in whom any particular characteristic as name, form, action, difference, class, quality does not exist – since by means of these the use of the word is given. And no one of these particular characteristics does exist in Brahman, so It cannot be defined in terms of: ‘This is that’, in the way as in the world a cow is defined saying: ‘It moves, it is white, it has horns’. Brahman is defined by means of name, form and actions that are superimposed on It [adhyāropita], as in the definitions: ‘Brahman is consciousness and happiness’, ‘Brahman-Ātman is only a compact mass of consciousness’. But when one wants to define the own nature (of Brahman), lacking any particular characteristic, that constitute a limitation, then one cannot define It at all. Thus it remains only this means, i. e. the definition through the negation of the usual definitions: ‘no, no’.” [nanu katham ābhyāṃ ‘neti neti’ iti śabdābhyāṃ satyasya satyaṃ nirdidikṣitam ityucyate – sarvopādhiviśeṣāpohena. yasmin na kaścīd viśeṣo ’sti - nāma vā rūpaṃ vā karma vā bhedo vā jātir vā guṇo vā; taddvāreṇa hi sābdapravṛttir bhavati. na caiśāṃ kaścīd viśeṣo brahmaṇyasti; ato na nirdeṣṭuṃ śakyate - idaṃ tad iti gaur asau spandate śuklo viśānīti yathā loke nirdiśyate, tathā; adhyāropita-nāmarūpakarmadvāreṇa brahma nirdiśyate ‘vijñānam ānandaṃ brahma’ (3, 9, 27-7) ‘vijñānaghana eva brahmātmā’ ityevamādiśab-daih. yadā punaḥ svarūpaṃ eva nirdidikṣitam bhavati nirastasar-

vopādhiviśeṣaṃ, tadā na śakyate kenacid api prakāreṇa nirdeṣṭum; tadā ayam evābhyupāyaḥ - yad uta praptanirdeśapraṭiṣedhadvāreṇa 'neti neti' iti nirdeśaḥ].

Although semantically speaking the negative determinations do not define or describe God or the Absolute, the final effect which the *Via Negationis* reaches at is very similar to that reached at by the *Via Eminentiae*: both give to God or to the Absolute (the one by means of assertions, the other by means of negations) a status that is far higher than everything, making thus God or the Absolute the Supreme Principle.

The *jīva*

Now we shall deal with the *jīva*. Some texts, as *Bhagavad Gīta* XV, 7, designate it as "a part of *Brahman*", the universal soul. That expression is to be handled with a certain prudence, anyhow it allows having an idea of the matter. The term *jīva* designates the individual spirit or the incarnated soul that conceives itself as a living and conscious individual, as an empirical ego, as a transmigrating being.

The *jīva* has thus a peculiar idea of itself: it considers that its body, its mental life, its emotional life are itself; it imagines that it is incarnated, that it is subject to suffering and ignorance, that it is the agent of activities and the subject of experiences, that it transmigrates, being born and dying once and again in a long chain of reincarnations that includes destinies of diverse nature. The *jīva* imagines thus that it is a being as the beings with which we are acquainted in common life (subject to suffering and ignorance, etc.), and with the destiny that Indian tradition had conceived for them (enchained to reincarnations); it sees itself as such.

The idea that the *jīva* forms of itself does not correspond to the truth of things, since the *jīva* in its true, concealed, authentic, and permanent nature is nothing else than *Brahman*, it is identical in essence with *Brahman*. See the commentary to the aphorism I, 4, 1, p. 376, line 6, that affirms that from the point of view of the absolute truth it does not exist any difference between the supreme *Ātman* and the *jīva* [*paramārthataḥ paramātmavijñānātmanor bhedābhāvāt*]. But this is

ignored by the *jīva*, is not perceived by it. It superimposes on *Brahman* the erroneous image of the empirical individuum that it thinks to be (I, 3, 19, p. 307, lines 10-13) [*nityaśuddhabuddhamukta-svabhāve kuṭasthanīte ekasminn asaṅge paramātmāni tadviparītaṃ jaivaṃ rūpaṃ vyomnīva-talamalādi-parikalpitaṃ*]. The *jīva* does not see itself as what it really is, but as something that it is not at all. The essential identity of *Brahman* and the *jīva* is expressed in many passages of Śāṅkara's work, as for instance in I, 1, 31, p. 222, lines 4-8, in which we read: "For, as the passages [*Bṛihadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* I, 4, 10:] 'I am Brahman', [*Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* VI, 8, 7:] 'That art thou', and others, prove, there is in reality no such thing as an individual soul [*jīva*] absolutely different from Brahman, but Brahman, in so far as it differentiates itself through the mind (*buddhi*) and other limiting conditions [*upādhi*], is called individual soul [*jīva*], agent, enjoyer [*nahi jīvo nāmātyantabhinno brahmaṇaḥ 'tat tvam asi' 'ahaṃ brahmāsmi' ityādiśrutibhyaḥ. buddhyādyupādihikṛtaṃ tu viśeṣaṃ āśrītya brahmaiva sañ jīvaḥ kartā bhoktā cetyucyate*].

But the most serious thing is not that the *jīva* has that erroneous idea of itself, but that the *jīva* exists, lives, and acts, experiencing or enjoying *illusoriously* all that it thinks to be. The *jīva*, for instance, inasmuch as it is *really Brahman*, is *really* beyond suffering, but it erroneously imagines that it is a being submitted to pain and fear, and so it suffers and is afraid, and thus that pain and that fear affect him, though they are pain and fear of an *illusory* nature. See Śāṅkara's commentary *ad* II, 3, 46, p. 623, lines 16-23: "The soul [*jīva*], being engrossed by Nescience [of his own nature], identifies itself as it were with the body, and so on, and imagines itself to be affected by the experience of pain which is due to Nescience, 'I am afflicted by the pain due to the body;' the highest Lord, on the other hand, neither identifies himself with a body, nor imagines himself to be afflicted by pain. The pain of the individual soul also is not real [*pāramārthika*], but imaginary only, caused by the error [*avidyā*] consisting in the non-discrimination of (the Self from) the body, senses, and other limiting adjuncts [*upādhi*] which are due to name and form, the effects of Nescience [*avidyā*]." [*jīvo hyavidyāveśavaśād dehādyātmabhāvam iva gatvā tatkr̥tena duḥkhena duḥkhyaham ityāvidyayā kṛtaṃ duḥkhopabhogam abhimanyate ... jīvasyāpyavidyākṛtanāmarūpanirvṛtta-*

dehendriyādyupādhyavivekabhramanimitta eva duḥkhābhimāno na tu pāramārthiko 'sti]". Because of being *Brahman* the *jīva* is free and cannot be enchained to reincarnations, but, imagining that it is a being submitted to reincarnations (*saṃsārin*), it experiences the process of reincarnations in the same way (it could be said) as one experiences a painful "hallucination". Cf. I, 2, 20, p. 255, lines 2-3, where Śaṅkara refers specifically to the experience of *saṃsāra* when, making allusion to the non-knowledge of the unity of the *jīva* with the supreme principle, he says: "*Hence there is room for those scriptural passages which set forth the distinction of knower and object of knowledge, for perception and the other means of proof, for the intuitive knowledge [anubhava] of the apparent world [saṃsāra], and for that part of Scripture which contains injunctions and prohibitions.*" [tataś ca jñātrjñeyādibhedaśrutayaḥ pratyakṣādīni ca pramāṇāni saṃsārānubhavo vidhipraśeḍhaśāstraṃ ceti sarvam etad upapadyate]. Though the *jīva* is not what it itself thinks to be, its destiny is that of the being it imagines to be. It lives as the man that being healthy imagines that he suffers from an illness and experiences its afflictions.

The situation described before lasts while the wrong idea about its own nature dominates the *jīva*. That erroneous idea is established in the *jīva* from a beginningless eternity; it could be said - in the way it is thought today - that in the human being due to his constitution as such and because of the existence in himself of certain physical components, there is a determinate form of grasping the reality in which he lives. According to the fundamental principle of Indian thought, the principle of beginninglessness (*anāditva*, see F. Tola and C. Dragonetti, "Anāditva or Beginninglessness in Indian Philosophy", in *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 1980, pp. 11-20), the *jīva* and the ignorance that affects him exist, *congenitally* we could say, from a beginningless eternity. For this reason it is not appropriated to ask why, when and how the *jīva* fell under the power of ignorance. He has always been submitted to it.

But, if in the past the *jīva* has been dominated by ignorance, he can be liberated from it in the future, by following the salvific method that the Vedānta preconized, and whose aim is to cause the knowledge of its *real* way of being to arise in the *jīva*. This is Liberation: on one hand, the disappearance of the erroneous image that the *jīva* has of

itself, of being different from *Brahman*, of being submitted to reincarnations, of being agent of actions and subject of experiences; and, on the other hand, the grasping by the *jīva* itself of its own essence; the recognizing itself as *Brahman*. All difference between the *jīva* and *Brahman* disappears, only *Brahman* remains, unique and without a second. On Liberation by means of knowledge see Śaṅkara's commentary *ad* I, 2, 6, p. 235, lines 6-7: "*As soon, however, as we grasp the truth that there is only one universal Self, there is an end to the whole practical view of the world with its distinction of bondage [to reincarnations], final release, and the like*" [gṛhīte tvātmaikatve bandhamokṣādisarvavyavahāraparisamāptir eva syāt]. Cf. commentary *ad* I, 2, 8, p. 237, lines 1-5: "*In spite of their [of the *jīva* and *Brahman*] unity, fruition on the part of the soul [*jīva*] does not involve fruition on the part of *Brahman*; because there is a difference. For there is a difference between false knowledge and perfect knowledge, fruition being the figment of false knowledge while the unity (of the Self) is revealed by perfect knowledge. Now, as the substance revealed by perfect knowledge cannot be affected by fruition which is nothing but the figment of false knowledge, it is impossible to assume even a shadow of fruition on *Brahman*'s part.*" [athāgṛhītaṃ śārīrasya brahmaṇaikatvaṃ, tadā mithyājñāna-nimittaḥ śārīrasyopabhogaḥ, na tena paramāṇtharūpasya brahmaṇaḥ saṃsparśaḥ ... viśeṣo hi bhavati mithyājñānasamyagjñānayoḥ. mithyājñānakalpita upabhogaḥ samyagjñānadr̥ṣṭam ekatvaṃ].

It could be said that even before Liberation the only thing that existed was *Brahman*, since the *jīva* never has ceased to be *Brahman*, though having an erroneous idea of itself, in the same way as the rope never has ceased to be rope, though being grasped as a serpent, as the water of the ocean kept in a vessel never has ceased to be water of the ocean (Cf. II, 1, 27, p. 476, lines 32-33: "*By a break ... [created by Nescience] a thing is not really broken up into parts ...*" [na hyavidyākālpitena rūpabhedena sāvayavaṃ vastu sampadyate], in the same way as the moon is not really multiplied by appearing double due to a defective vision.

The *jīva* is perhaps the most importante personage of the drama that describes the Vedānta of Śaṅkara. Not only because all the system of Śaṅkara has as its aim to cause the *jīva* to reach salvation (i.e. to

recognize itself as *Brahman*), since all the system is essentially a salvific path for the *jīva*, but also because the whole reality, the whole illusionism, the whole “idealism”, that manifests itself in the system, has its origin in the *jīva* and in the error or nescience (*avidyā*) that dominates it; and it is from this perspective, the *jīva*’s, that it has to be focussed.

Avidyā

What is the cause by which the *jīva* does not perceive itself as what it really is (i.e. as *Brahman*) but as something that it is not, as the beings that we know by experience? The cause is simply the ignorance (*avidyā*) on the part of the *jīva* of what it really is, the erroneous knowledge (*mithyājñāna*) about its own nature, the false grasping of its real being. Ignorance or error or nescience is thus the cause of the illusion consisting in assuming that there exist an object, a subject and a process of knowledge (commentary *ad I*, 1, 4, p. 124, line 9: *avidyākalpitam vedyaveditṛvedanādibhedam*); that the *jīva* transmigrates (*ibidem*, p. 125, line 2: *avidyākalpitasamsāritva°*); that the *jīva* is different from *Brahman* (*ibidem*, p. 124, line 7: *avidyākalpitabheda°*); that the *jīva* has a body (*ibidem*, p. 150, line 3: *śarīrādyātmābhīmānino*); that the *jīva* is a being that experiences (commentary *ad I*, 2, 8, p. 237, line 5: *mithyājñānakalpita upabhogaḥ*), (commentary *ad I*, 1, 4, p. 150, line 4: *duḥkhabhayādīmattvam*).

The ignorance to which the *jīva* is submitted is not a supernatural entity, a maleficent metaphysical power, a cosmical factor with an own and autonomous existence, something standing in opposition to *Brahman*, which it hinders or prevents to know. This was Śaṅkara’s conception; those who attributed to ignorance a transcendent *status* were his disciples. Ignorance, that prevents the *jīva* reaching the knowledge of *Brahman*, is a mere mental affection such as the one that is constantly given in daily life and in common experience. It is rather usual to take a thing for another, to grasp it wrongly, to get a wrong idea about it be. It is well known the example of the rope taken for a serpent due to darkness. The commentary on Bādarāyaṇa’s aphorism I, 3, 2, p. 274, lines 1-3, throw light upon this matter: “*The conception*

that the body and other things contained in the sphere of the Not-self are our Self, constitutes Nescience [avidyā]; from it there spring desires with regard to whatever promotes the well-being of the body and so on, and aversions with regard to whatever tends to injure it; there further arise fear and confusion when we observe anything threatening to destroy it. All this constitutes an endless series of the most manifold evils with which we all are acquainted.” [dehādīṣvanātmasvahaṃ asmītyātmabuddhir avidyā, tatas tatpūjanādaḥ rāgaḥ tatparibhavadādaḥ ca dveṣaḥ tad ucchedadarśanād bhayaṃ mohaś cetyevam ayam anantabhedo 'narthavrātaḥ saṃtataḥ sarveṣāṃ naḥ pratyakṣaḥ]. *Avidyā* is presented as a simple idea, of course erroneous, which gives rise to desire, aversion, and fear, to mental confusion. In several places as III, 3, 32, p. 818, line 7, IV, 2, 7, p. 973, line 10, *avidyā* is designated with the term *kleśa*: “impurity”. See P. Hacker, “Eigentümlichkeiten der Lehre und Terminologie Śaṅkaras”: *Avidyā, Nāmarūpa, Māyā, Īśvara*”, in *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1978, pp. 69-109 (=ZDMG, 100 NF, 1950, pp. 246-286), a fundamental piece of work owing to Hacker’s method and conclusions.

Ignorance has two capacities: on one hand, *āvaraṇāśakti* or capacity of hiding, and, on the other hand, *vikṣepaśakti* or capacity of projecting (Sadananda, *Vedāntasāra*, 62 y 64). In relation to the true nature of the *jīva*, ignorance on one side hides it, and, on the other, projects a false image of it, as the error in regard to the rope in darkness at the same time hides its true being (rope), and projects a false idea of it (serpent). Utilizing the terminology proper to Vedānta it can be said that man *superimposes* on *Brahman* the false idea constructed by *avidyā*.

The only thing peculiar to *avidyā* Śaṅkara is interested on is the object to which ignorance applies: the *jīva*.

A first product of the ignorance, that hides *Brahman*, the sole transcendent reality that exists, and substitutes it by the unreal image of a empirical inexistent *jīva*, is thus a cognitive act of the *jīva*, the great protagonist - as we have already said - of the Vedāntic drama. The false image of its own self, created by the same *jīva*, due to the error in which it incurs, is the first element of the great illusion opposed to *Brahman*, the sole Reality.

The world

Śaṅkara's idea concerning the world is similar to that referring to the *jīva*. The world is unreal, it has the *status* of an illusion created by the *jīva* due to the ignorance or error, and superimposed on *Brahman*. The commentary of aphorism II, 1, 22, p. 472, lines 24-26, says: *"Moreover, as soon as, in consequence of the declaration of non-difference [between the jīva and Brahman] contained in such passages as: 'that art thou', the consciousness of non-difference arises in us, the transmigratory state of the individual soul [jīva] and the creative quality of Brahman vanish at once, the whole phenomenon of plurality, which springs from wrong knowledge, being sublated by perfect knowledge, and what becomes then of the creation and the faults of not doing what is beneficial, and the like? For that this entire apparent world [saṃsāra], in which good and evil actions are done, &c, is a mere illusion, owing to the non-discrimination of (the Self's) limiting adjuncts, viz. a body, and so on, which spring from name and form the presentations of Nescience, and does in reality not exist at all [paramārthataḥ], we have explained more than once. The illusion is analogous to the mistaken notion we entertain as to the dying, being born, being hurt, &c. of ourselves (our Selves; while in reality the body only dies, is born &c.)."* [api ca yadā tat tvam asītyevamjātiyakenābhedanirdeśenābhedaḥ pratibodhito bhavati, apagataḥ bhavati tadā jīvasya saṃsāritvaḥ brahmaṇaś ca sraṣṭṛtvam; samastasya mithyājñānavijṛmbhitasya bhedavyavahārasya samyagjñānena bādhitavāt. tatra kuta eva sṛṣṭiḥ. kuto vā hitākaraṇādayo doṣāḥ? avidyāpratyupasthāpitanāmarūpakṛtakāryakaraṇasaṃghātopādhyavivekakṛtā hi bhrāntir hitākaraṇādilakṣaṇaḥ saṃsāro na tu paramārthato 'stītyasakṛd avocāma. janmamarāṇacchedanābhedanādyabhimānavat]. Cf. II, 1, 14, p. 457, line 14; II, 2, 2, p. 494, lines 10-11; III, 2, 4, p. 693, line 17; III, 2, 21, pp. 712-713, lines 20-11. The world imagined by the *jīva* is not something static; it is a world provided with a functioning so illusory as its existence; in it there are illusory movement, physical phenomena, natural laws, everything that exists in the world we live in. Nevertheless, the *jīva* imagines that that world exists; it perceives it in front of itself; it thinks that it lives in that world, that it is submitted to the physical laws, and to the social norms that govern

that world; all its existence and experience take place in that unreal world as if it really existed. Its life elapses in an hallucination that possesses all the marks of a true reality.

As in the case of the false image that the *jīva* has of itself, the arising of the image of the world is due to *avidyā*, the ignorance, the error, the nescience in which man incurs. See the commentary of the aphorism II, 1, 33, p. 481, lines 3-4: "...the scriptural doctrine [Śruti] of creation [sṛṣṭi] does not refer to the highest reality; it refers to the apparent world only, which is characterised by name and form, the figments of Nescience..." [na ceyaṃ paramārthaviṣayā sṛṣṭiśrutiḥ. avidyākālpitanāmarūpavyavahāragocaratvāt]. See also the commentary to the aphorisms IV, 3, 14, p. 1001, line 20; II, 2, 21, p. 713, line 7; II, 1, 33, p. 481, lines 3-4 [*avidyādhyāropitanāmarūpa°*, *avidyādhyāsto ... prapañco*, *avidyākālpitanāmarūpavyavahāra°*]. The *avidyā* projects thus in front of man the deceitful image of that multiple and various world; that image interposes itself between the *jīva* and *Brahman*, it is superimposed on *Brahman*, hindering the *jīva* to perceive the unique reality, the unity and singularity of *Brahman*. Only when in the *jīva* arises the knowledge of its own nature, i.e. when it knows that it *is Brahman* (the sole existent), the illusion of that falacious world disappears, nothing of it remains.

The world, such as we perceive it, is thus the second element of the great illusion which conceals *Brahman* from us.

The Lord (Īśvara)

We have said that the essential characteristic of *Brahman* is to be the only really existent, and that this singularity eliminates any shadow of duality, and confers to *Brahman* the characteristics of incognizable and ineffable. The Lord that appears in Śāṅkara's work is, as a consequence, as well as the *jīva* and the world, an illusory creation due to ignorance or error or nescience that dominates it. The Lord is the third element of the great illusion which stands between the *jīva* and *Brahman*. All that Śāṅkara expresses with reference to the Lord has to be interpreted in function of such fundamental principle of his system.

It cannot be postulated a *real* creator and governor of a world that is *unreal* and whose functioning is as well *unreal*. Neither it is possible that a *real* personal God rule the destiny of unreal devotees, the unreal *jīvas*.

In the commentary to the aphorism III, 2, 21, pp. 712-713, lines 20-9, it is said: "*This argumentation we meet by asking our opponent of what nature that so-called annihilation of the apparent world is. Is it analogous to the annihilation of hardness in butter which is effected by bringing it into contact with fire? or is the apparent world of names and forms which is superimposed upon Brahman by Nescience to be dissolved by knowledge, just as the phenomenon of a double moon which is due to a disease of the eyes is removed by the application of medicine? If the former, the Vedic injunctions bid us to do something impossible; for no man can actually annihilate this whole existing world with all its animated bodies and all its elementary substances such as earth and so on. And if it actually could be done, the first released person would have done it once for all, so that at present the whole world would be empty, earth and all other substances having been finally annihilated.- If the latter, i.e. if our opponent maintains that the phenomenal world is superimposed upon Brahman by Nescience and annihilated by knowledge, we point out that the only thing needed is that the knowledge of Brahman should be conveyed by Vedic passages sublating the apparent plurality superimposed upon Brahman by Nescience, such as [do the Upaniṣadic passages:] 'Brahman is one, without a second;' 'That is the true, it is the self [ātman] and thou art it' (Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI, 2, 1; 8, 7). As soon as Brahman is indicated in this way, knowledge arising of itself discards Nescience, and this whole world of names and forms, which have been hiding Brahman from us, melts away like the imagery of a dream.*" [atra vyaṃ prcchāmaḥ - ko 'yaṃ prapañcapravilayo nāma? kim agnipratāpasamparkād ghṛtakāthinyappravilayaḥ iva prapañcapravilayaḥ kartavya āhosvid ekasmiṃś candre timirakṛtāneka-candraprapaṇcavad avidyākṛto brahmaṇi nāmarūpaprapaṇco vidyayā pravilāpayitavya iti. tatra yadi tāvad vidyamāno 'yaṃ prapaṇco dehādīlakṣaṇa ādhyātmiko bāhyaś ca pṛthivyādilakṣaṇaḥ pravilāpayitavya ityucyeta sa puruṣamātreṇāśakyah pravilāpayitum iti tatpravilayopadeṣo 'śakyaviṣaya eva syāt. ekena cādimuktena pṛthivyādipravilayaḥ kṛta itīdānīm pṛthivyādiśūnyaṃ jagad abhaviṣyat. athāvidyādhyasto brah-

man्यekasminn ayam prapañco vidyayā pravilāpyata iti brūyāt. tato brahmaivāvidyādhyastaprapañcapratyākhyānenāvedayitavyam 'ekam evādvitīyaṁ brahma' 'tat satyaṁ sa ātmā tat tvam asi' (*Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* VI, 8, 7) iti, tasminn āvedite vidyā svayam evotpadyate, tayā cāvidyā-bādhyate, tataś cāvidyādhyastah sakalo 'yam nāmarūpāprapañcaḥ svapnaprapañcavat pravilīyate]. This argumentation relative to the world can be applied to the Lord: if the Lord be real, the mere knowledge of *Brahman* by the *jīva* would not affect Him at all, and, after Liberation of the *jīva*, the Lord would stand by the side of *Brahman*, which is notwithstanding postulated as one and without a second.

Brahman moreover is beyond any change (*vikriyā*), cannot suffer any transformation or evolution (*pariṇāma*) of any kind. If the only real, *Brahman*, cannot transform itself *really* into the Lord, wherefrom could the Lord get His real existence?

Many texts, as for instance I, 1, 20, p. 196, lines 4-11, declare that the attributes of the Lord have been superimposed upon *Brahman* in order to be able to do of this one an object of cult and worship.

The passage we quote now confirms the unreality of the *Īśvara*: commentary of the aphorism II, 1, 14, p. 462, lines 20-30: "*Thus the Lord [Īśvara] depends (as Lord) upon the limiting adjuncts of name and form, the products of Nescience; just as the universal ether depends (as limited ether, such as the ether of a jar, &c.) upon the limiting adjuncts in the shape of jars, pots, &c. He (the Lord) [Īśvara] stands in the realm of the phenomenal in the relation of a ruler to the so-called gīvas (individual souls) or cognitional Selfs (vigñānātman), which indeed are one with his own Self – just as the portions of ether enclosed in jars and the like are one with the universal ether – but are limited by aggregates of instruments of action (i.e. bodies) produced from name and form, the presentations of Nescience. Hence the Lord's being a Lord, his omniscience, his omnipotence, &c. all depend on the limitation due to the adjuncts whose Self is Nescience; while in reality none of these qualities belong to the Self [Ātman] whose true nature is cleared, by right knowledge, from all adjuncts whatever... In this manner the Vedānta-texts [as the ones just quoted: *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* VII, 24, 1, and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* II, 4, 13] declare that for him who has reached the state of truth and reality the whole apparent world does not exist. The *Bhagavadgīta* (V, 14, 15) also ... declares that in reality the*

relation of Ruler and ruled does not exist. That, on the other hand, all those distinctions are valid, as far as the phenomenal world is concerned..." [evam avidyākṛtanāmarūpopādhyanurodhīśvaro bhavati, vyomeva ghaṭakarakādyupādhyanurodhi. sa ca svātmabhūtān eva ghaṭākāśasthānīyān avidyāpratyupasthāpitanāmarūpakṛtakāryakaraṇasaṃghātānurodhino jīvākhyān vijñānātmanah pratīṣṭhe vyavahāraṇīyāḥ. tad evam avidyātmakopādhiparicchedāpekṣam eveśvarasyeśvaratvaṃ sarvajñatvaṃ sarvaśaktitvaṃ ca, na paramārthato vidyayā 'pāstasavopādhisvarūpa ātmanīśītrīśitavyasarvajñatvādivyavahāra upapadyate ... evaṃ paramārthāvasthāyāṃ sarvavyavahārābhāvaṃ vadanti vedāntāḥ sarve ... tatheśvaragītāsvapi ... iti paramārthāvasthāyāṃ īśītrīśitavyādivyavahārābhāvaḥ pradarśyate. vyavahārāvasthāyāṃ tūktāḥ śrūtāvapīśvarādivyavahārah...].

The Lord is the image of a personal God, endowed with qualities, with the most sublime qualities, free from any deficiency and defect, object of worship and cult, image that is superimposed by the *jīva* upon *Brahman*. The image of the Lord corresponds to the conception of a personal God that India had developed in the first centuries of our Era. See H. Jacobi, *Die Entwicklung der Gottesidee bei den Indern*, Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1923, and G. Bulcke, S.J., *The Theism of Nyaya-Vaisesika. Its Origin and Early Development*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968. Afterwards we shall indicate some of the attributes of the Lord. Through them we shall see that the characteristics of this Indian personal God do not differ from the characteristics of a personal God reached by Western culture. Both are similar or even identical.

Moreover, this Lord, even being illusory, is not a static image as are not either the *jīva* or the world. In the same way as the world presents itself in front of the *jīva* functioning as functions the world in which we live, so the Lord presents itself in front of the imagination of the *jīva* doing all the actions of a personal God: He creates the world, He controls it, He puts in movement what has to move, etc. The illusion is not only that of a Lord, but also is of the activity this Lord carries out.

The Īśvara possesses, according to the image of Īśvara that the *jīva* has superimposed upon *Brahman*, a power to create and control the world, but that power is of an illusory character as well as the world that the Īśvara creates, as the Īśvara's creative and governing

activity, and as the existence itself of the Īśvara. It would be difficult to admit in an unreal creator a real power destined to create an unreal world.

The illusory nature of the Lord, of His activity and of His power, in the system of Śaṅkara, is, as we have said, difficult to be admitted by persons of a profound theistic conviction, and for this reason, among his interpreters it has been in a general way the tendency to dissimulate it or conceal it. It even could be thought that the conversion of *avidyā* (ignorance, nescience) from a mere individual psychological and epistemological deficiency into a cosmic potency subordinated to the Īśvara or to *Brahman* would have had its origin in that theistic attitude of the disciples of Śaṅkara. We think that many of the theoretical difficulties that the system of Śaṅkara rouses are due to the fact of bestowing reality to the Īśvara instead of the illusory status that Śaṅkara himself, coherently with the fundamental principle of his system (*only-Brahman*), has granted to Him.

*Brahman and the Lord as two aspects of the same reality.
Śaṅkara's perspectivism*

Brahman and the Lord can be considered as two aspects of the same entity: *Brahman*, the real aspect without characteristics (*nirguṇa*), the Lord, the illusory aspect endowed with the most sublime attributes (*saguṇa*), superimposed upon *Brahman* by the *jīva* dominated by error. Cf. Śaṅkara's commentary to Bādarāyaṇa's aphorism I, 1, 11, p. 176, lines 9-10: "*Brahman is apprehended under two forms; in the first place as qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multiformity of the evolutions of name and form (i.e. the multiformity of the created world); in the second place as being the opposite of this, i.e. free from all limiting conditions whatever.*" [dvirūpaṃ hi brahmāvagamyate, nāmarūpavikārabhedopādhiviśiṣṭaṃ, tadviparītaṃ ca sarvopādhivivarjitaṃ]. Cf. I, 1, 11, p. 176, lines 16-17: "*All these passages, with many others, declare Brahman to possess a double nature, according as it is the object either of Knowledge or of Nescience.*" [evaṃ sahasraśo vidyāvidyāviśayabhedena brahmaṇo dvirūpatāṃ darśayanti vākyaṇi].

The texts that refer to *Brahman* without qualities (*nirguṇa*) and *Brahman* with qualities (*saguṇa*) must not induce to think that there are two *Brahmans*, what would destroy the absolute non-dualism which dominates Śaṅkara's thought. There is only one *Brahman*, lacking any determination, who can only be defined by means of the *Via Negationis* – *Brahman nirguṇa*. *Brahman saguṇa* (with qualities) is nothing but the illusory image that the *jīva* forms itself of *Brahman*, shaped as a personal God and that it superimposed upon *Brahman* which the *jīva* cannot reach due to ignorance. We find here again the opposition of a singular and sole Reality, *Brahman nirguṇa*, and an illusion, *Brahman saguṇa*, the Lord.

Thus Śaṅkara has an openly *perspectivist* position. Standing in the “perspective of knowledge” (i.e. of truth), *Brahman* is conceived as the only real, unreachable entity, that only can be described by means of the *Via Negationis*; but adopting the “perspective of ignorance or nescience” (i.e. of error), *Brahman* is grasped under the illusory image of a personal God endowed with sublime qualities, in the same way as by means of a true perception we see the rope as rope and by means of a false perception we see it as serpent.

The *jīva* is always in the “perspective of ignorance”, since it is enchained to ignorance as long as it is not delivered from it thanks to the discipline the Vedānta provides. When the *jīva* reaches knowledge, only then it stands in the “perspective of knowledge”, but at the very moment it recognizes itself as *Brahman*, all the illusion created by ignorance disappears, and there remains only the *jīva* in its condition of *Brahman* – *Brahman* in its absolute unity, singularity and isolation. The “perspective of knowledge”, that we can theoretically individualize and study, is in reality an instantaneous experience that as soon as it is produced ceases to exist.

As a consequence of what precedes it is to be said that in Śaṅkara always coexist a negative “theology” – whose object is *Brahman*, “pure” (*śuddha*) according to the qualification of the commentary to the aphorism I, 2, 2, p. 234, line 1 – and a positive “theology”, whose object is *Brahman* with qualities (*saguṇa*), i.e. the Lord. Never one of these two theologies can be given alone, since in this case the system of Śaṅkara would be destroyed. Of course it is possible that one or the other theology have more presence in some determinate passages of his work according to the subjects analyzed by Śaṅkara.

Attributes of Brahman and of the Lord

Now, Śaṅkara indistinctively utilizes the terms *Brahman* and *Īśvara* (Lord), in spite of the fact that both refer to two totally different concepts: sometimes he employs one, sometimes the other; moreover he confers to *Brahman* and to the *Īśvara*, in numerous passages of his work, the same attributes. See for instance the commentary to the short aphorism I, 1, 11, lines 1 and 3, in which he refers to the *Īśvara* with the words *sarvajña īśvaro jagataḥ kāraṇam* and to *Brahman* with *sarvajñaṁ brahma jagataḥ kāraṇam*: the Lord/*Brahman* omniscient cause of the universe.

This way of acting could surprise. Hacker, in his quoted article, pp. 285-286, even dares to criticize the imprecision (*Ungenauigkeit*) of Śaṅkara in relation to the terms *īśvara* and *brahman*, and this would be, according to Hacker, a manifestation of Śaṅkara's absolute carelessness (*souveräne Sorglosigkeit*) in face to conceptual systematics. We think – contrarily to the opinion of Hacker – that in relation to the use of the terms *īśvara* and *brahman* Śaṅkara does not incur in any incoherence or confusion. *A priori* it is hard to believe that a thinker of the high intellectual level of Śaṅkara, who manifests in all his work his sharpness, subtlety and rigour, could incur in an incoherence, or confusion, in regard to two basic notions of his system, to which he repeatedly refers in his voluminous work. We consider that Śaṅkara could indistinctively utilize the terms *Īśvara* and *Brahman* without committing an incoherence or giving place to a confusion, since it suffices, in order that this do not occur, to have in mind that when Śaṅkara mentions *Brahman* accompanied by some attribute, quality, characteristic, activity, behaviour or any other determination, he is referring to the Lord.

We must “distribute” the attributes that Śaṅkara confers indistinctively to *Brahman* and to the Lord: the “negative” attributes must be reserved for *Brahman*, the Supreme Principle, the only real, that is beyond word and mind; the “positive”, for the Lord, personal God rich in determinations, but of illusory nature.

Let us point out in what follows some of the attributes of the Lord.

The Lord is the arjé

Commenting Bādarāyaṇa's aphorism I, 1, 2, pp. 85-86, lines 5-2, Śaṅkara affirms that the Lord is the *arjé* of everything: "*That omniscient omnipotent cause from which proceed the origin, subsistence, and dissolution of this world – which world is differentiated by names and forms, contains many agents and enjoyers, is the abode of the fruit of actions, these fruits having their definite places, times, and causes, and the nature of whose arrangement cannot even be conceived by the mind, - that cause, we say, is Brahman* [it must be understood: the Lord]." [asya jagato nāmarūpābhyāṃ vyākṛtasya, anekakartṛbhoktṛsaṃyuktasya, pratiniyatadeśakālanimittakriyāphalāśrayasya manasāpyacintyaranārūpasya janmasthitibhaṅgaṃ yataḥ sarvajñāt sarvaśakteḥ kāraṇād bhavati, tad brahma...].

In this same passage Śaṅkara rejects other cosmogonic theories: "*The origin, &c. of a world possessing the attributes stated above cannot possibly proceed from anything else but a Lord possessing the stated qualities; not either from a non-intelligent pradhāna, or from atoms, or from non-being, or from a being subject to transmigraton* [mythical being called Hiraṇyagarbha]; *nor, again, can it proceed from its own nature (i.e. spontaneously, without a cause), since we observe that (for the production of effects) special places, times, and causes have invariably to be employed.*" (p. 88, lines 2-4, of the quoted edition). [na yathoktaviśeṣaṇasya jagato yathoktaviśeṣaṇam īśvaraṃ muktvā 'nyataḥ pradhānād acetanāt, aṇubhyo 'bhāvāt, saṃsāriṇo vā utpattyādi sambhāvayituṃ śakyam. naca svabhāvataḥ viśiṣṭadeśakālanimittānāṃ ihopādānāt]. See also the commentaries to the aphorisms I, 1, 11, p. 176, lines 1-8, I, 4, 14, p. 400, lines 1-3, expressly referred to the Īśvara.

The Lord is a spiritual being

Another extremely important characteristic of the Lord is His "spirituality", understanding by this term the being conscious, intelligent, subject of knowledge. In numerous places *Brahman* (the Lord) is referred to with the word *buddha* (intelligent) and *sarvajña* (omni-

scient), as in I, 1, 1, p. 79, line 2: “*Brahman [= Īśvara], which is all-knowing and endowed with all powers, whose essential nature is eternal purity, intelligence, and freedom, exists.*” [asti tāvad brahma nityaśuddhabuddhamuktasvabhāvaṃ, sarvajñaṃ, sarvaśaktisamanvitaṃ]. In I, 1, 2, p. 86, line 2, it is said about *Brahman*. Īśvara-that-It (He) is the omniscient and omnipotent cause of the arising, conservation and destruction of the world; the same idea is expressed in I, 1, 5, p. 161, lines 2-3. Śaṅkara, commenting the aphorism III, 2, 16, p. 709, says: “*And Scripture [Śruti] declares [in Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad IV, 5, 13, which the commentary immediately quotes] that Brahman consists of intelligence, is devoid of any other characteristics, and is altogether without difference; ‘As a mass of salt has neither inside nor outside, but is altogether a mass of taste, thus, indeed, has that Self [Ātman; we must understand: Brahman] neither inside nor outside, but is altogether a mass of knowledge (Bri.Up. IV,5,13). That means: That Self [Ātman] has neither inside nor outside any characteristic form but intelligence; simple non-differentiated intelligence constitutes its nature; just as a lump of salt has inside as well as outside one and the same saltish taste, not any other taste.’*” [āha ca śrutiś caitanyamātraṃ vilakṣaṇarūpāntararahitaṃ nirviśeṣaṃ brahma – ‘sa yathā saindhavaghano ’nantaro ’bāhyaḥ kṛtsno rasaghana evaivaṃ vā are ’yam ātmā ’nantaro ’bāhyaḥ kṛtsnaḥ prajñānaghana eva’ (Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad IV, 5, 13) iti. etad uktaṃ bhavati - nāsyātmāno ’ntar bahir vā caitanyād anyad rūpaṃ asti, caitanyam eva tu niranta-ram asya svarūpaṃ. yathā saindhavaghanasya antar bahiś ca lavaṇarasa eva nirantaro bhavati na rasāntaraṃ tathāiveti]. In other passages directly referred to the Lord (as for instance: II, 3, 30, p. 611, lines 8-9) the treatise affirms: “*For in attempting to determine the object of the Vedānta-texts we meet with no other intelligent substance but the one omniscient Lord whose nature is eternal freedom.*” [na hi nityamuktasvarūpāt sarvajñād Īśvarād anyaś cetano dhātur dvitīyo vedāntārthanirūpaṇāyāṃ upalabhyate]. In his commentary to Bādarāyaṇa’s aphorism I, 3, 19, p. 307, lines 7-8, Śaṅkara refers to the “...only one highest Lord ever unchanging, whose substance is cognition.” [eka eva parameśvaraḥ kūṭasthanītyo vijñānadhātur].

Other attributes of the Lord

The preceding quoted texts point out some other attributes of the Lord: omnipotent [*sarvaśakti*] (I, 1, 2, p. 86, line 2), eternal, pure, intelligent, free [*nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta*] (I, 1, 1, p. 79, line 2). To these attributes others can be added: Lord of all, *Ātman* of all, one, without a second [*sarveśvara, sarvātman, eka, advitīya*] (I, 4, 14, p. 400, lines 2-3); omnipresent [*sarvadeśeṣu vidyamānatvāt*] (I, 2, 7, p. 235, line 13); always perfect [*nityasiddha*] (I, 1, 5, p. 171, line 7); inalterable [*kūtaṣṭha*] (I, 3, 19, p. 307, line 10); lacking any defect, evil thing or impurity [*sarvadoṣair alipta*] (I, 2, 13, p. 247, line 4); does not require something on which to lean upon, is established in his own greatness, pervades everything [*anādhāra, svamahimapra-tiṣṭhita, sarvavyāpin*] (I, 1, 20, p. 194, line 1); nobody is equal to Him, nobody superior [*na tatsamaś cābhyadikaś ca*] (quotation) I, 1, 5, p. 171, line 11); is the motor principle of everything [*sarvaṃ pravartayet*] (II, 2, 2, p. 494, lines 9-10); matrix (origin) of all beings [*bhūtayoni*] (I, 2, 21, p. 258, lines 1 and 13); His essence is happiness [*ānanda*] (I, 1, 13-14, p. 181 *passim*; I, 3, 9, p. 282, line 9).

Final reflection

As a conclusion and as a result of the previous remarks, we can add to the qualifications of "monism" and "idealism", that we have applied to the system of Śaṅkara in the beginning of this article, those of "illusionism", "dynamic illusionism" and "perspectivism", which give an idea of the originality and novelty of one of the major thinkers of India.

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